

Woman's Union Missionary Society.

ONE OF INDIA'S WIDOWS.

BY MISS M. C. LATHROP.

THE conditions of Indian life, which bear hard on women of all classes, are nowhere so severely felt as by those who have the misfortune to be widows. A man may have been a tyrant, and in all ways as unlovely as it is possible for one to be, yet his death is loudly lamented, and with cause by his widow, whose condition from thenceforth is far worse than ever before. Why it is that when disease, to which all mortals are liable, carries away a husband, it should be laid at his wife's door as a greivous sin, for which she must through life suffer the most rigid austerities, seems a strange thing; but so it is, as all who have known the lives of Indian women can testify. Many have said that it was no kindness to them to have the practice of Suttee abolished. Blessings were promised them through this rite, and almost infinite good to the man who had departed.

Going one day to a house where we had several pupils, we found them all in deep grief over the sudden death of the father of two of the young women we taught. Their mother, a bright, handsome woman, always well dressed, and with jewels on her person, was in the habit of coming often to the room where her daughters were engaged with us, and we felt we knew her well, and that she was very liberal in her views. This day we found her prostrate on the floor of her room, with dishevelled hair, clothed in the one poor garment of a widow, and divested of all her jewels. We could scarce command her attention for a moment, her constant lament being that her husband was gone and that English law forbade her to sacrifice herself upon his funeral pyre. She, like many another in her circumstances, felt that the short, sharp suffering of Suttee was preferable to the long-continued hardships that might fall to her lot as a widow. She being the mother of grown sons, might expect an amelioration of the state to which a childless widow would be brought at once. We often wonder that more of this class do not escape from their hard lives when Christianity is offered them, with its promise of liberty and social rights for all classes.

The fact remains, that widows do not leave their places of bondage for that reason; but when the Truth finds its way to the heart of a widow, she has come to know and feel that she is freer to leave her home and go where she can confess her new faith than is a woman bound to her husband.

A case of this kind that occurred some time ago had some

features of special interest. A family of the highest caste, and of wealth, had been taught for years by missionaries, last of all by us. The interest of the women in Christianity came to be so apparent, not only to their teachers but to those of the family opposed to it, that we were told we could no longer visit them. We gave them up with sorrow, which the women fully shared. The girls were not removed from school, so that we were not entirely shut away from intercourse with the family. These children told us often that their mother, and, in fact, all the women in the house, wished to be Christians. They told us, too, that their sister, a little older than they, had said openly that she would be a Christian, and immediately arrangements were made for her marriage which were with haste carried out, and she was sent away to live in the atmosphere of a rigid Hindu household. After that, I think, no one ventured to mention the subject in the house. An aunt who was a childless widow, lived with them, and she determined to go away, considering herself free to do so. She asked us through the children to come for her, but this is a thing we never do in any case, as by it we should lay ourselves liable to prosecution, and the woman would be taken from us, so no one would gain, and we should injure instead of helping the cause we have so much at heart. We told her, as we always tell people in such cases, that she could come to us and we would help her in every possible way. We prayed for her when we met together and in private, asking that the way might be made plain to her and that she might have cour-

age to do her part. One day I was told that some one was in the sitting-room wishing to speak with me. I went in, and with gladness recognized this woman wrapped closely in her clean, white cloth. Her story was soon told by her, and by the two well-known native Christian ladies who were with her. She, too, had been praying that a way would open for her to do as she so greatly desired, when it came to her mind that she might walk out of the house and trust the Lord to guide her. Accordingly, this day, after the men had gone to their offices and the women were in the upper rooms taking their daily sleep, she put everything in order in the house, changed her soiled saree for a clean one, and walked out with no earthly possessions but the one garment she wore. She did not know which way to turn to reach the road, so close had been her seclusion in the narrow lane where the house was situated. A beggar boy asked alms; she in turn asked a favor from him, that he should show her the road. When she came to the road, the Lord so specially cared for her that she saw a carriage passing; the inmates recognized that she was a zenana woman with her cloth drawn closely about her, and showing the timid air usual with such persons when they find themselves among strangers. They called to her and found she was the one of whom they had been conversing, and hoping they might meet, as they had heard of her desire to leave her Hindu home. These ladies, well known as active Christians, are related to the family, but having been forbidden to visit there, since coming to the city, were not known

by sight to the widow. They soon made themselves known, and at her request took her at once to the house of a missionary, who, after a few words with her, gladly gave her what she wished, baptism. Then the ladies brought her to us, as they feared her angry relatives might go to them thinking to find her. They said that as soon as the storm which they felt sure would arise on account of this blew over, they would be happy to have her find a home with them. We had not a good place to keep her for a time, but took her to a missionary friend. The Christian ladies, in addition to other work, had just opened their home to famine orphans to be supported by the Indian Christian Association of their Province, and in this we, as well as they, saw a door of usefulness open before our friend.

We expected there would be trouble made with us when it was known that a woman had left a family of good standing; but as Saturday and Sunday went by and we heard nothing, we sent Monday morning to the house for the children as usual. When the woman who collects children in their neighborhood returned, she came to tell me that for some strange reason she had been harshly repulsed from that door by one of the men of the house. We teach in the houses of relatives of this family, and we feared to find their doors closed to us. Such was not the case, however, and no word has ever been spoken in the city to us regarding her. Since that time the children have been allowed to return to school, much to their joy, as they, too, love Christ and wish to learn more of Him. Through them, too, the

mother can get light and help, for she as truly believes in Christ as the one who has come away.

A few years ago a woman leaving a high-caste, prominent Hindu family, to become a Christian, would have stirred such feeling among the people of their class that our work would have suffered, for a time at least. The barriers are being slowly broken down, and it may be that this woman, who loves her family and does not wish to be separated from them, but only asks to be permitted to serve God according to the dictates of her own conscience, will be allowed to visit her old home. I asked how she was convinced that Christianity was the true religion. She replied very simply, "When I first heard of Christ I wanted Him to be my Saviour, and when I learned to read the Bible, or when I heard it read, my heart was glad because I knew it was the truth." No one could talk with her without feeling that she was taught of the Spirit, and that she had been constrained by love to Christ to take the step she had taken. Her face fairly shone as she talked of Him. That a useful life lies before her we cannot doubt, and in the place where she is, she will have constant opportunities to serve Him in the persons of His little ones.

Miss Lathrop has conducted the work of the WOMAN'S UNION MISSIONARY SOCIETY in Allahabad, India, for twenty-two years, gathering about her a large corps of missionaries, who instruct thousands of women in the zenanas, or children in zenana schools.

For the converts who seek the protection of Christians, a home has been opened where its inmates may be trained to self-support. The Society which supports this and kindred work in Calcutta and Cawnpore, India, is undenominational, being organized in 1860, with unsalaried officers, as a direct means of evangelization between Christian women and their oppressed heathen sisters. It is dependent entirely on voluntary contributions, and as it was the first American organization for this object, and has been signally blessed of the Lord, it seeks, yea, even *claims*, the support of every woman in this country.

Donations may be sent to the officers of the
Woman's Union Missionary Society,

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